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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2575
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5018
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2773
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2638
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3262
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3430

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 000409

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN; DRL/IRF

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: RESIDENT TURKISH CITIZENS BARRED
FROM IMPORTING KORANS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Sylvia R. Curran.
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On March 30, poloff met with the Turkish Embassy's Counselor for Religious Affairs Aziz Chankaya to hear his views on religious practice in Turkmenistan. Chankaya explained that his role is to advise the Turkish Embassy on religious affairs as they involve the resident Turkish community. He said there is no specific mosque that is frequented by the Turkish community, but that Turks worship together with Turkmen at different mosques. He noted that Turks and Turkmen share a common religious faith, and that the Turkish people originated from the area that is now Turkmenistan. According to Chankaya, there are no religion-related issues between Turkey and Turkmenistan. He acknowledged that there might have been some bilateral cooperation on religious issues in the years after Turkmenistan's independence, but he said that was before his arrival and he knew nothing about it.

¶2. (C) As far as he knew, Chankaya thought there was no presence or following in Turkmenistan of Turkish religious movements such as Nursi. He said Nursi is banned in Turkey itself, and that there were no illegal religious movements from Turkey present in Turkmenistan. The Turkish Government plays no role in religious education in Turkmenistan, according to Chankaya. He said the Turkmen have the view that they can teach their imams themselves, in part drawing on the historical legacy of the formerly great Islamic centers at Merv and Dashoguz. He declined to comment on the effect that 70 years of Soviet rule might have had on that historical legacy.

¶3. (C) On the subject of access to religious literature, Chankaya shared that the Turkmenistan Government does not allow books about religion to be brought from Turkey. Also, the State Council on Religious Affairs ("CRA") has denied the Turkish Embassy's request to import copies of the Koran. Chankaya explained that the Turkish Embassy would like to import the Koran solely for use by Turkish citizens living here. He said the CRA explained that imported copies of the Koran "could have mistakes and mislead people." Turkish citizens have had personal copies of the Koran seized by Customs officials upon arrival, saying that the holy books need to be verified to insure they contain no mistakes.

Chankaya said he did not know whether the Korans had ever been returned.

14. (C) COMMENT: Chankaya has been in Turkmenistan for 14 months. Previously, he worked for the Turkish Ministry of Religion for 28 years as an inspector, visiting Turkish mosques to insure that there was no preaching about government matters and no spreading of the teachings of illegal Islamic movements. Given his background, it is unlikely that Chankaya is so poorly informed about Turkey's past cooperation with Turkmenistan on religious matters, or about the presence of different Islamic movements in Turkmenistan. As a Turkish-only speaker, perhaps he was not comfortable discussing these subjects openly in front of his Turkmen interpreter/assistant. All the same, the problems he described involving Turkish citizens bringing Korans into the country, either personally or through the embassy, tracks with the difficulties that minority religious groups have often encountered when legally trying to import religious literature. END COMMENT.

MILES